

The Senate bill was ordered to be read a third time, was read the third time, and passed, and a motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. EVERETT. Madam Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days within which to revise and extend their remarks on S. 700, the Senate bill just considered and passed.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Alabama?

There was no objection.

WILDLAND FIRE MANAGEMENT ACT

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. MICA). Pursuant to House Resolution 135 and rule XVIII, the Chair declares the House in the Committee of the Whole House on the State of the Union for the consideration of the bill, H.R. 581.

□ 1423

IN THE COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

Accordingly, the House resolved itself into the Committee of the Whole House on the State of the Union for the consideration of the bill (H.R. 581) to authorize the Secretary of the Interior and the Secretary of Agriculture to use funds appropriated for the wildland fire management in the Department of the Interior and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, 2001, to reimburse the United States Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Marine Fisheries Service to facilitate the interagency cooperation required under the Endangered Species Act of 1973 in connection with wildland fire management, with Mrs. MORELLA in the chair.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The CHAIRMAN. Pursuant to the rule, the bill is considered as having been read the first time.

Under the rule, the gentleman from Colorado (Mr. HEFLEY) and the gentleman from the Virgin Islands (Mrs. CHRISTENSEN) each will control 30 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Colorado (Mr. HEFLEY).

Mr. HEFLEY. Madam Chairman, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Madam Chairman, I introduced H.R. 581 to assist the U.S. Forest Service in expediting the transfer of funds from the Service to other Federal agencies for critical and necessary interagency consultation activities in connection with wildland fire management.

H.R. 581 is simply a technical fix to clarify that funds appropriated in the 2001 Interior and Related Agencies Appropriation Act for wildland fire management may be transferred to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Na-

tional Marine Fisheries Service to reimburse those agencies for the fuel load reduction consultation activities required by section 7 of the Endangered Species Act.

Madam Chairman, the fiscal 2001 Interior Appropriations Act appropriated \$2.9 billion towards the National Fire Plan in response to the devastating 1999 and 2000 fire seasons. The \$2.9 billion which was appropriated, which included \$1.6 billion designated as emergency contingent funding, is administered by the Department of Interior and the Forest Service. Included in the plan are funds specifically directed for reducing fuel load. However, before fuel loads can be reduced, the Forest Service must meet existing laws, including the Endangered Species Act.

Among the goals of the National Fire Plan are: to build firefighting readiness, to be better prepared to fight wildland fires; to reduce hazardous fuels, to invest in projects to reduce the fire risk; to restore fire-impacted sites, to restore landscapes damaged by fire; to protect communities, to concentrate efforts in the wildland-urban interface; and to assure accountability and track accomplishments of the plan.

Decades of excluding fire from our forests and past management practices have drastically changed the ecological condition of western forests and rangelands and dramatically affected fire behavior. A century ago when low-intensity, high-frequency fires were commonplace, many forests were less dense and had larger, more fire-resistant trees. Over the last century, the number of trees has increased dramatically and composition of our forests has changed from primarily fire-resistant tree species to more species that are nonresistant to fire.

Madam Chairman, the fire ecologists point out the paradox in which we now find ourselves in terms of fire suppression: The more effective we become at fire suppression, the more fuels accumulate and ultimately create conditions for the occurrence of more intense fires, such as those we in the West have experienced the last 2 years.

To illustrate my point, here is a statistic to think about: In the early 1930s, the annual acreage burned by wildfires in the lower 48 States was about 40 million acres a year. By the late 1950s, we were effectively controlling fires at less than 5 million acres per year. Through the 1970s and much of the 1980s, the annual acreage burned by wildfires in the lower 48 States stayed at about the same levels, but in 1988 and again in the late 1990s we had severe seasons, burning close to 10 million acres each year.

Experts predict that future fire seasons will be similar to last year's devastation.

Reversing the effects of a century of aggressive fire suppression and past management practices will take time

and money targeted to high-priority areas to protect people, communities, readily-accessible municipal watersheds, and habitat for threatened and endangered species. The most at-risk areas are those wildland-urban interface zones represented by areas with increased residential development in fire-prone areas adjacent to Federal land.

With continuing drought in the western and southern United States, we are facing the threat of another possibly horrendous and catastrophic wildfire season. It is important that H.R. 581 proceed expeditiously to launch the multiagency fire prevention initiative needed to ward off another devastating wildfire season.

The funds made available in this bill to the Fish and Wildlife Services and the National Marine Fisheries Services will enable the Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management to proceed with their fire management program, as intended by the 2001 Appropriations Act. The bill will not affect other aspects of the National Fire Plan.

Lastly, Madam Chairman, H.R. 581, I do not believe, is controversial. It is nonpartisan and it is supported by the administration. It is also reported by unanimous consent from the Committee on Resources. So I would urge an aye vote on H.R. 581.

Madam Chairman, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mrs. CHRISTENSEN. Madam Chairman, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Madam Chairman, H.R. 581 was introduced, as we heard, by the gentleman from Colorado (Mr. HEFLEY) from the Committee on Resources and our esteemed chairman of the Subcommittee on National Parks, Recreation, and Public Lands.

The legislation authorizes the Secretary of the Interior and the Secretary of Agriculture to use funds appropriated for wildland fire management in the fiscal year 2001 Interior Appropriations Act to reimburse the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Marine Fisheries Service for the costs of carrying out the responsibilities under the Endangered Species Act in connection with wildland fire management activities.

□ 1430

The legislation is necessary because without such reimbursement authority, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Marine Fisheries Service would be required to carry out their endangered species responsibilities related to wildland fire management activities using their existing resources. The effect of this would be potentially to delay important fire management projects.

Although no hearings were held on this measure, the Committee on Resources favorably recommended the